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Ford Urges Spy Cost Data Stay a Secret

President Ford has asked the Senate intelligence committee to reverse its decision to disclose the overall cost of the nation's intelligence effort.

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), the committee chairman, said yesterday that the committee had already voted 8 to 3 to publish the multibillion-dollar figure, but could meet again Monday in light of Mr. Ford's personal request.

The President asked the committee by letter this week not to disclose the total because of apprehensions voiced by the Central Intelligence Agency that repeated use of the figure would adversely affect CIA operations, Church said. He said the committee had "heard the argument before" but would meet Monday with CIA Director George Bush as a courtesy to Mr. Ford.

Campaigning in Nebraska in a late-starting bid for the Democratic presidential nomination, Church said he had no intention of changing his vote to release the figure.

The spending total the committee plans to disclose includes the direct costs of the CIA's operations together with the foreign activities of the FBI and the various military intelligence operations. There would be no breakdowns. Church said the figure for fiscal 1976, would "no more bear on the national security than figures published annually on defense spending."

The committee is expected to release its final report on foreign intelligence activities Monday morning. Church said the cost figure was kept out of the report in anticipation of the last-minute dispute, but will be announced later Monday if the committee sticks to its earlier decision.